

Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage
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April 2, 2026

Chair Sen. Melissa H. Wiklund and
Members of the Health and Human Services Committee, Minnesota Legislature

Re: Letter of Support SF 4337 Certain children in foster care grant establishment and appropriation

Chair and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

The Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage (CMAH) supports SF 4337, legislation establishing a grant program to ensure that noncitizen immigrant youth in Minnesota’s foster care system receive timely immigration screening, documentation support, and legal representation. This bill addresses a critical and persistent gap affecting some of the state’s most vulnerable children, including a significant number of youths of African Heritage.

African Heritage communities across Minnesota include African American families with deep generational roots in the state, as well as one of the largest African-born immigrant populations in the nation. Minnesota is home to substantial Somali, Ethiopian, Liberian, Nigerian, Eritrean, and Kenyan communities, many of whom arrived as refugees or through humanitarian pathways. These communities contribute to Minnesota’s workforce, cultural vitality, and economic growth, yet continue to face disproportionate barriers in child welfare, public safety, and economic systems. African Heritage youth remain overrepresented in Minnesota’s foster care system. For noncitizen youth within this population, the challenges are compounded by immigration-related vulnerabilities, including lack of documentation, limited access to legal counsel, and the risk of aging out of foster care without the legal status needed to secure employment, housing, education, and long-term stability. SF 4337 directly responds to these realities.

The bill strengthens county nonprofit partnerships to ensure that every child in need of protection or services is screened for essential documents such as birth certificates and Social Security cards. It further ensures that noncitizen youth receive legal assessments and representation to pursue permanent legal status or work authorization. These supports are essential for youth who may otherwise face deportation risks, barriers to adulthood, or exclusion from Minnesota’s economic and civic life. The bill’s requirements for language access, cultural responsiveness, and demonstrated experience working in diverse communities are particularly important for African Heritage youth. Many African immigrant families speak languages such as Somali, Amharic, Oromo, Tigrinya, Arabic, and French. Ensuring that legal services are linguistically accessible and culturally grounded strengthens trust, reduces barriers, and improves outcomes for youth and families.

The impact of SF 4337 extends beyond individual case outcomes. Securing legal status for noncitizen youth strengthens Minnesota’s future workforce, reduces long-term public costs associated with homelessness or justice-system involvement, and promotes safer, more stable communities. For African Heritage Minnesotans who remain deeply invested in the well-being of children, families, and community stability, this legislation represents a meaningful step toward equity, safety, and justice within the child welfare and public safety systems.

The Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage supports SF 4337 and urges its passage as a necessary measure to protect vulnerable youth, strengthen families, and advance Minnesota's commitment to racial equity, immigrant inclusion, and the long-term success of African Heritage communities across the state.

Sincerely,

Linda Sloan | Executive Director
Lolita Davis Carter | Legislative & Policy Director
Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage

The Minnesota Legislature empowered the Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage to ensure that people of African heritage fully and effectively participate in and equitably benefit from the State of Minnesota's political, social, and economic resources, policies, and procedures. Generally, the Council is charged with the responsibility of:

- *Advising the Governor and the Legislature on issues confronting People of African Heritage;*
- *Advising the Governor and the Legislature on statutes, rules, and revisions to programs to ensure that Black people have access to benefits and services provided to people in Minnesota;*
- *Serving as a liaison to the federal government, local government units, and private organizations on matters relating to People of African Heritage in Minnesota;*
- *Implementing programs designed to solve problems of People of African Heritage when authorized by statute, rule, or order; and*
- *Publicizing the accomplishments of People of African Heritage and their contributions to the state.*